

Ombudsman's Message

As Utah's Office of Child Protection Ombudsman (OCPO) is a consumer service based office, OCPO staff strives to provide each person who contacts OCPO with the time to listen and understand constituent concerns and offer objective feedback. Consumers who contact OCPO are typically concerned that a Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS) employee has failed to meet the consumer's expectations regarding their individual DCFS case. Although OCPO cannot provide the desired outcome in every instance, our knowledgeable staff can ensure that when individual cases are reviewed and/or investigated, it is done with independence, thoroughness, and accuracy. The OCPO office is small in number, but the well qualified staff offers a high standard of service to both the individual consumer and to DCFS. OCPO is pleased to outline this past year's highlights.

O CPO STAFF AND LOCATION:

OCPO is one of the smallest offices within the Department of Human Services (DHS) having only three staff. OCPO is located in downtown Salt Lake City in the DHS Administrative Office Building. As investigations are conducted throughout the State of Utah, staff travels from Salt Lake City to the location of where the DCFS case is being managed. Although few in number, OCPO provides essential customer service to the citizens of Utah. Without an Ombudsman's office, consumers would not have anywhere to go for an independent review of their concerns about DCFS cases.

Carol Cook has been with OCPO since this office's creation in 1996. Carol handles most of the incoming calls and/or requests for investigation; conducts reviews of cases (Investigation I's) from the DCFS information management data base, called SAFE; creates reports on individual case reviews for DCFS; and runs statistical reports.

Tanya Alborno transferred to OCPO from DCFS where she was a permanency caseworker for 4 ½ years in the Salt Lake Valley Region. Tanya has been with OCPO for the past 1 ½ years. Tanya acts as Carol's backup for Intake; conducts reviews (Investigation I's) and full investigations (Investigation II's) on individual DCFS cases; and creates reports of her investigations for DCFS.

Dianne Warner-Kearney is the Deputy Ombudsman. Prior to working with OCPO, Dianne worked 28 years in child protection in the State of Idaho and for the Utah DCFS. Dianne has been with OCPO for the last 4 ½ years. In addition to helping OCPO operate on a daily basis, Dianne carries a full caseload of investigations, writes reports, and completes other administrative duties.

OCPO staff is knowledgeable about DCFS Practice Guidelines, the DCFS Practice Model, and Utah child welfare laws. This knowledge base allows each individual to provide information to the consumer accessing OCPO's services and helps the consumer obtain useful information about DCFS. OCPO staff also helps the consumer define their concerns, clarifies the consumer's rights and responsibilities, explains available options,

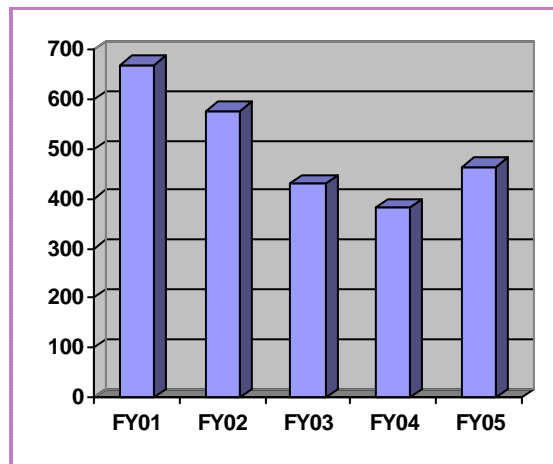
reasonable expectations, and the conflict resolutions process. OCPO also utilizes a team approach and the team reviews reports for content, thoroughness, and accuracy prior to a report being distributed.

Initiation of OCPO services:

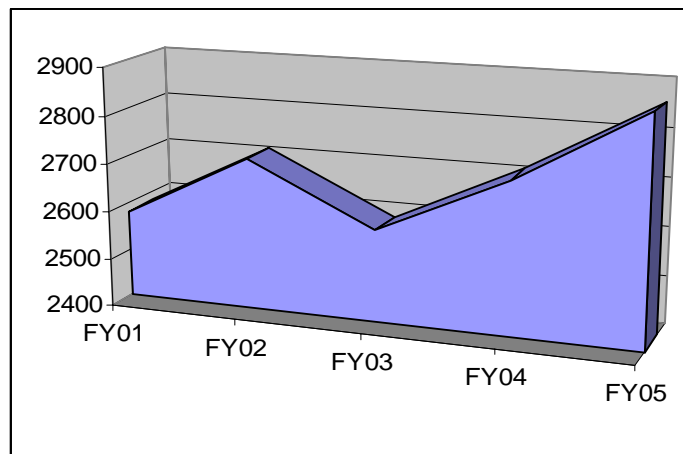
Once a consumer contacts OCPO, basic information is collected as to the identity of the consumer, whether or not the consumer has worked with DCFS staff regarding their concerns, and the exact nature of the concerns. The consumer concerns are first forwarded to the DCFS Administration (State Constituent Services Program Manager) if a consumer has not talked with the caseworker, supervisor, or other DCFS management about their stated concerns. This step provides the consumer with an opportunity to work within the DCFS process to have the concerns addressed at the lowest level possible. In some cases OCPO does not request DCFS to respond to OCPO at this stage. In cases where the consumer agrees to have DCFS address the concern at the worker/supervisor level, but OCPO finds that a written response is needed, OCPO requests DCFS to provide a written response within 10 working days of the request. Each request is tracked and followed up on with the consumer. Instances in which the consumer informs OCPO that contact with DCFS is not wanted, OCPO forwards the concerns to DCFS Administration and provides notification that the consumer does not wish to work with DCFS in regards to the concern(s). OCPO also requests a written response. Once the response is received by OCPO, the consumer is contacted and it is determined what action, if any, is warranted. This may include a further review of the case that can be completed by reviewing the DCFS information management system (SAFE). In cases where there might have been significant weaknesses in the case, OCPO can determine, at that point, to notify DCFS Administration that OCPO will be conducting an investigation.

As the graphs, on the following page, show, during FY05, the number of intakes OCPO processed exceeded the past two years. The Intake Activities graph shows the amount of work OCPO staff complete during the intake phase by identifying the number of activities completed, such as, e-mail messages to DCFS staff; telephone contacts, review of documentation, etc. OCPO notes that during FY01, OCPO had 7 staff members; during FY02, OCPO had 5 staff members; during FY03, OCPO had 5 staff members; during FY04, OCPO had 3 staff members; and, during FY05, OCPO had 3 staff members. Even with the decrease in staff that occurred in 2004, the work completed during FY05 shows the extent of OCPO's commitment and the work that has been done to ensure the consumer's concerns are addressed. The "Number of Intake Activities Completed" chart also indicates cases now receive more follow up than they did in 2001 and 2002. More complaints are being resolved in the initial (intake) phase than in prior years. In cases where the complaint can not be resolved in intake, it may be opened for a full investigation.

Number of OCPO Intakes

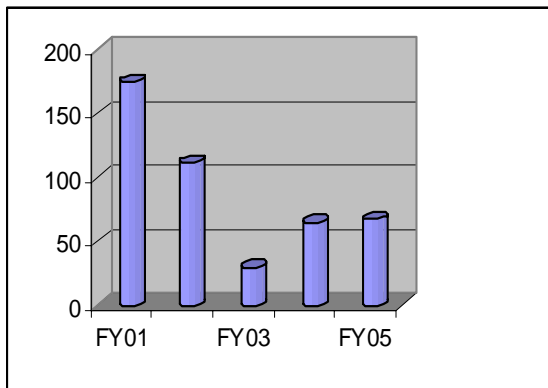


Number of Intake Activities Completed

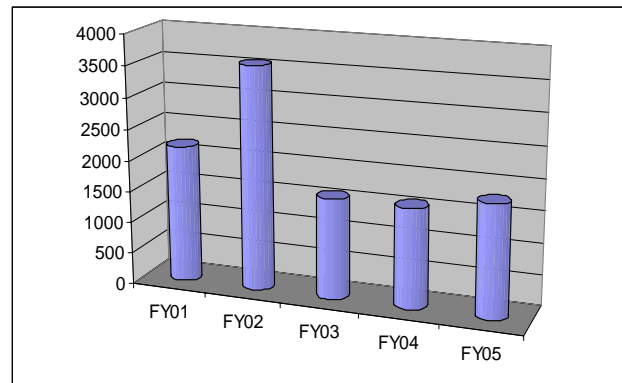


Cases assigned for Investigation: When the consumer informs OCPO that they continue to have concerns and request that OCPO conduct an investigation, a determination is made after additional review if an OCPO investigation is warranted. This determination is based on OCPO identifying DCFS Practice Guidelines and/or Utah law that was not followed by the DCFS caseworker or other “best practice” efforts that might make a difference in the outcome for the child. In FY05, out of 465 total intakes, OCPO only forwarded 206 cases to DCFS Administration. The remaining 259 cases were handled strictly by OCPO staff.

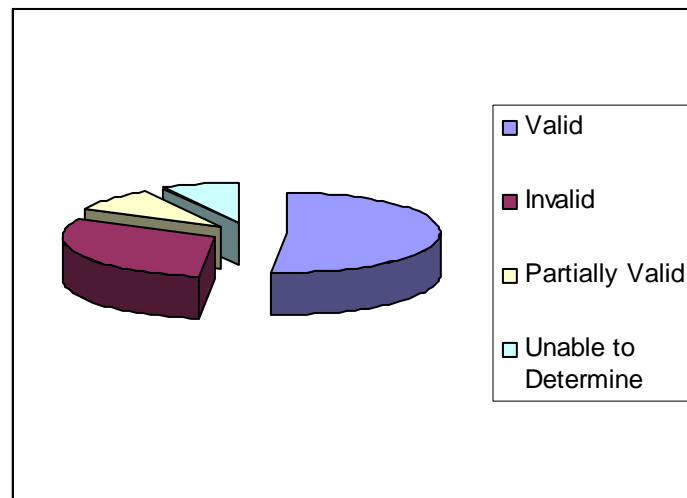
Number of Investigations



Number of Investigative Activities



OCPO not only receives specific concerns directly from the consumer, but OCPO has the capacity to identify concerns that have been noted during the intake process or during an Investigation I. In FY05, OCPO investigated a total of 211 concerns. The consumer identified 46% (97) of the total number of concerns in individual cases while OCPO identified 54% (114) of the concerns. At the conclusion of an investigation, OCPO determined that 52% (50) of the consumer's complaints were valid. OCPO additionally found that 31% (30) consumer complaints were invalid; 9% (9) were partially valid and in 8% (8) of the concerns, OCPO was unable to determine the validity. By comparison, during FY04, OCPO investigated a total of 67 concerns with 50% of the concerns being found to be valid and 50% to be invalid.



To better serve the consumer, if another agency or office would best suit the consumer's need for information or to process a complaint, OCPO refers the consumer to other government or private agencies/offices. Consumer feedback suggests that although OCPO cannot provide outcomes the consumer may want in every case, OCPO is a place where concerns can be expressed openly without fearing consequences for making a report and objective feedback can be obtained.

